

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NR USE C

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

St. Mary's Church

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

St. Benedict

CITY, TOWN

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Kansas

VICINITY OF

No. 2, Jim Jeffries

CODE
20

COUNTY

Nemaha

CODE

131

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- ☐ DISTRICT
- ☐ BUILDING(S)
- ☐ STRUCTURE
- ☐ SITE
- ☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- ☐ PUBLIC
- ☐ PRIVATE
- ☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- ☐ IN PROCESS
- ☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- ☐ OCCUPIED
- ☐ UNOCCUPIED
- ☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

- ☐ YES: RESTRICTED
- ☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED
- ☐ NO

PRESENT USE

- ☐ AGRICULTURE
- ☐ MUSEUM
- ☐ COMMERCIAL
- ☐ PARK
- ☐ EDUCATIONAL
- ☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ☐ ENTERTAINMENT
- ☐ RELIGIOUS
- ☐ GOVERNMENT
- ☐ SCIENTIFIC
- ☐ INDUSTRIAL
- ☐ TRANSPORTATION
- ☐ MILITARY
- ☐ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Most Reverend Ignatius Strecker, Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas

STREET & NUMBER

2220 Central Avenue, Post Office Box 2328

CITY, TOWN

Kansas City

VICINITY OF

STATE

Kansas 66101

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Nemaha County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Seneca

STATE

Kansas 66538

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

131-0000-006

DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT _____
GOOD _____
FAIR _____
_____ DETERIORATED
_____ RUINS
_____ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☒ UNALTERED
_____ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
_____ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

St. Mary's Church stands at the southern edge of St. Benedict, a farming village on a hill overlooking Wildcat Creek in northwestern Nemaha County. It is a rectangular stone building with a prominent tower and large stained glass windows. A rectory, convent, school, cemetery, and grotto of more recent vintage are clustered around the church.

The church is 162 feet long and 60 feet wide with the main entrance at the west and apsidal projections at the east. The exterior walls are constructed of rock-faced buff-colored limestone. Buttresses punctuate the walls and corbeling accentuates the eaves and gables. "White" limestone is applied in a few special areas, notably in the main entrance arch.

Because the church is set on a hill and the bell tower rises 172.5 feet above the ground level entrance, it is a prominent local landmark. As a reporter for the Topeka Daily Capital described it in 1938, "the community of St. Benedict is hidden in the valley behind the church and cannot be seen until one arrives within a half mile of the church."

The octagonal spire has a pyramidal roof sheathed with copper. In the tower hangs a set of four original bells---3200, 1800, 900, and 500 pounds in weight. A small lantern is located on the ridge at the crossing of nave and transept gables. Originally covered with slate shingles, the roof is now covered with aluminum shingles.

All major windows and doors are set in round-arched openings. There is a fan light above the main west entrance and colored, leaded glass in the windows above the two entrances which flank it. Each entrance is recessed and cased in wood millwork. The typical window form is a pair of tall arches topped by a rosette light. The windows are leaded and glazed in various colors. Milled wooden roll moldings articulate the frames.

In plan St. Mary's is a Gothic hall-church (hallen kirche); the aisles are carried up to nearly the height of the nave, and there are no projecting transepts. Along the nave ten cast iron columns, four-lobed in section, support a series of groined vaults. The nave vaults are 52.5 feet high; the side vaults are 35 feet high. The transept and crossing vaults are 52.5 feet high. The sanctuary is marked by a communion rail, and the main altar is situated behind in the apse. On either side of the apse is a sacristy. At the west end of the church there is a small vestibule/narthex which opens into an open area underneath the balcony which holds the choir seating and organ.

In contrast to its rather simple exterior, the interior of St. Mary's Church

SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
1000-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1893-94

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St. Mary's Church is significant primarily for the exceptional quality and abundance of its turn-of-the-century interior decoration. In addition, the visual prominence of the building in its rural setting reflects the fact that the church has been the most important social and cultural institution throughout the history of this small farming community.

A small group of Catholic settlers in the vicinity of Wildcat Creek sent a representative in 1858 to the newly established St. Benedict's Priory in Atchison to ask for a priest. A small frame church (12 feet x 25 feet) was built in 1859 and occasional services were held. A priest's house was built in 1860. In June, 1861 P. Severin Rotter became the first priest to reside in Nemaha County. A larger church (18 feet x 35 feet) was built in 1864. During this period, however, the pastor residing at St. Mary's also served a number of other communities--some as many as twenty miles away. Only after 1883 did St. Mary's Church have its own pastor in continuous residence.

Remembering this period prompted a church historian to describe St. Mary's Church as, the fruitful mother of many children. St. Bridget, SS Peter and Paul (Seneca), St. Bede (Kelly), and Sacred Heart (Baileyville) were all started with the greater portion of their original families taken from St. Mary's

The first two churches were established in the 1860's. St. Bede's at Kelly was started in 1902. Sacred Heart was not established until 1909 when members of St. Mary's Parish living west and northwest of St. Benedict formed the Baileyville church.

From 1868, when the priest's residence was transferred to Seneca, until 1883, St. Mary's was formally a mission attached to Seneca. Because a railroad was completed through Seneca in 1867, this town three miles east of St. Benedict became the county center. Father Emmanuel Hartig was pastor of Seneca and "Wildcat" (St. Benedict) from 1875 to 1881. He placed advertisements in Catholic newspapers during 1878-79 to promote settlement of the area. Many new immigrants from the east came to St. Mary's Parish. A new church building (60 feet x 90 feet) was built in 1880.

In 1880 there were sixty families belonging to the parish. By that time Benedictine Sisters were teaching in the school associated with St. Mary's Church.

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 1

is enriched by lavish decoration and ornamentation. Four types of decoration are used: stained glass windows, decorative mural stenciling and painting, paintings on canvas, and polychromed plaster sculpture.

In each transept wall, there is a set of three elaborate stained glass windows. These windows, imported from Germany, are the finest in the array of St. Mary's Church. In addition to its arched fenestration, the church has six circular stained glass windows. Of these, four are "roses" and are located at the extremities of the latent cruciform plan. Two more circular windows in the apse wall represent the "Sacred Heart of St. Mary." The one south of the main altar was originally above the altar. When the altar was raised and obscured the window from view, it was moved to the present location.

The stenciled designs cover the interior walls and vaults of St. Mary's Church among these are many insignias--most of them bearing Latin inscriptions. The painting is especially florid and concentrated above the side altars and above and beside the main altar. High in the nave are six large mural oil paintings of Biblical scenes. Four circular oil paintings are placed next to the transept windows (two on each side).

Between the aisle windows are mounted plaster representations of the Stations of the Cross, two per wall space, fourteen in all. There are also eleven more plaster sculptures, imported from Germany, in various locations.

The wooden side altars are elaborately carved and hold three figures each. The main altar is even more ornate. From its oak base rises a richly molded and gilded system of orders, niches, and pediments, all bearing more figures. Another oil painting, "The Assumption of our Blessed Mother," surmounts and provides a backdrop to the main altar.

Alterations

The most significant changes to the exterior of St. Mary's Church have occurred in the last twenty years. The roof was resingled in 1960. The walls were sandblasted, repointed with a Portland cement mortar and waterproofed with a silicon compound in 1973. Concrete front steps and a wheelchair access ramp were built in 1978.

Interior alterations began as early as 1936 when three volunteers refinished the floors and pews. The interior was reportedly further refurbished in 1942. Heating ducts along the walls of the church, just above the tops of the pews, were installed in 1947. Incandescent lamps and spotlights now supplement the natural lighting. Originally, chandeliers (true candle-burning fixtures) were used.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

Now located in the south transept at the end of the communion rail, the old pulpit once hung on the southwest column below the crossing vault. It was canopied at that time, and raised several feet above the floor. The pipe organ is silent for mechanical reasons, and an electric organ console has been added.

A major interior renovation project is also currently underway at St. Mary's Church. Several years ago, the south aisle wall and the vaulted ceiling were damaged by moisture so severely that it was deemed necessary to replaster the area. A local artist is now at work painting stenciled designs onto the freshly plastered surface which duplicate those which originally decorated the wall. The sand-float finish of the original plasterwork has also been substantially duplicated. This work is expected to be finished in May, 1981.

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

School had been held at St. Mary's on the Wildcat as early as 1864 with a Catholic layman as teacher. When the Sisters began teaching, the school was officially designated the district school.

In 1883 when a post office was established in the community on Wildcat Creek, the name of the town was changed to St. Benedict. A description of the growth and composition of the community was provided by a church census recorded in 1888. The families of St. Mary's Parish included many small children of school age. A large proportion of the parents had been born in northwestern Germany. Another large group had come from central and southern Germany. Also, a significant number of Irish families had settled along Turkey Creek in the northern part of St. Mary's Parish.

By 1889 more than one hundred families crowded the church building. Parishioners had to decide whether to enlarge the existing church or construct a new building. At the Bishop's instigation, plans for a magnificent stone church were prepared. Funds were raised by subscription.

Rev. Pirmin Koumley supervised construction of the foundation. This was done in 1891 and cost \$3,500. Then the parish waited for more than a year to begin laying stone for the walls of the church.

Work began again in 1893. Rev. Herman Mengwasser replaced Koumley to lead the task of building. He had been educated in Europe before coming to the United States where he joined the order of St. Benedict in Atchison. After five years of study, Mengwasser was ordained. He was a professor at St. Benedict's College until 1888. In 1890 he made a return visit to the Netherlands and Germany. When he returned to Atchison, he became business manager of the college. From this post he was appointed pastor of St. Mary's Parish in 1892. Mengwasser served until 1900; it may be that his experience and leadership contributed to the general quality and sophisticated interior ornamentation of St. Mary's Church.

Under Mengwasser's leadship, parishioners began hauling stone in the spring of 1893 from the Schneider and Harley farms three miles northeast of St. Benedict. Almost all the labor of quarrying, hauling and laying the stone was donated. The iron columns along the nave, which support the ceiling vaults and roof were cast in nearby Seneca, Kansas. The cornerstone of the new church was laid April 30, 1893; the building was under roof by December 1, 1893.

St. Mary's Church was completed on November 13, 1894 and dedicated the next day. Three thousand people attended this service. The church was consecrated on the feast

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE

2

of Corpus Christi June 1, 1899.

Cost of construction was \$40,000 and an additional \$40,000 was spent on furnishings. The six stained glass windows in the transept, which were made by Mayer and Company of Munich, Germany cost \$2,400. Bells for the church were acquired in 1895 from H. Stuckstede of St. Louis, Missouri. William Bauhaus of Leavenworth designed and built the elaborate main altar in 1899. The two side altars and communion railing were made by E. Hackner of Lacrosse, Wisconsin in 1900.

G.F. Satory of Wabasha, Minnesota painted the mural decoration in 1901. In the same year Theodore Zukotynski of Chicago, Illinois was commissioned to paint twelve large canvases depicting the life of the Virgin Mary. A set of fourteen polychromed Stations of the Cross were added in 1903 around the perimeter of the walls; a year later eleven statues of various saints (made in Germany) were added to decorate the aisle columns.

The elaborate decorative program of the church was not in itself unusual for the period, for numerous Catholic churches built at this time in Kansas, usually with immigrant congregations, were lavished with stenciling, paintings, and statuary. However, comparison with these other examples suggests that at St. Mary's a special effort was made to obtain skilled craftsmanship and decorative pieces of good quality.

Even after the church was completed, St. Mary's Parish continued to grow, although this had little effect on the town of St. Benedict, which continued to be served by a single general store. After the Baileyville church splintered off in 1909, a modern brick school was built in 1914 next to St. Mary's Church. Two years later, the parish boasted 150 families. When the new school building was completed, the Bishop discontinued the cooperative arrangement that had been in effect with the public school district. Since the community was almost entirely Catholic, the change was not an imposition.

This separation lasted only until 1935, however, when St. Benedict's school was again designated a district school in order to take advantage of a cooperative school law passed by the state legislature which brought the community relief from the financial expense of maintaining a separate parochial school. For a few years afterwards, St. Benedict's had a high school, but now the older students attend the Seneca high school after completing the eighth grade. Currently there are about 125 families in St. Mary's Parish.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

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Seneca Courier-Tribune, anniversary edition. 12-15-1938.

"Native Stone Grotto Built near Church at St. Benedict," Topeka Daily Capital.
10-16-1938.

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(n.p., 1938).

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Lewis Publishing Co., 1900).

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Tennal, Ralph. History of Nemaha County, Kansas. (Lawrence, Kansas :
Standard Publishing Company, 1916).

Wolters, Gilbert F. "A Socio-Economic Analysis of Four Rural Parishes in
Nemaha County, Kansas," dissertation, Catholic University of America.
(Washington, D. C., 1938).

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See attached sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1

QUADRANGLE NAME St. Benedict

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24

UTM REFERENCES

A 14 7481159 44118889
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: The nominated property is approximately one acre beginning at the point where state secondary road 178 turns north into the unincorporated community of . Benedict. The boundary proceeds from the intersection east 220 yds., then north 220 yds., then west to the paved road.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
-------	------	--------	------

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
-------	------	--------	------

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Julie A. Wortman, Architectural Historian, and Dale Nimz
Historic Preservation Department

ORGANIZATION Ks. State Historical Society DATE 10-1-80

STREET & NUMBER 120 West 10th TELEPHONE 913 296-3251

CITY OR TOWN Topeka STATE Kansas 66612

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE Joseph W. Snell

TITLE Executive Director, Ks. State Historical Society DATE 10-14-80

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

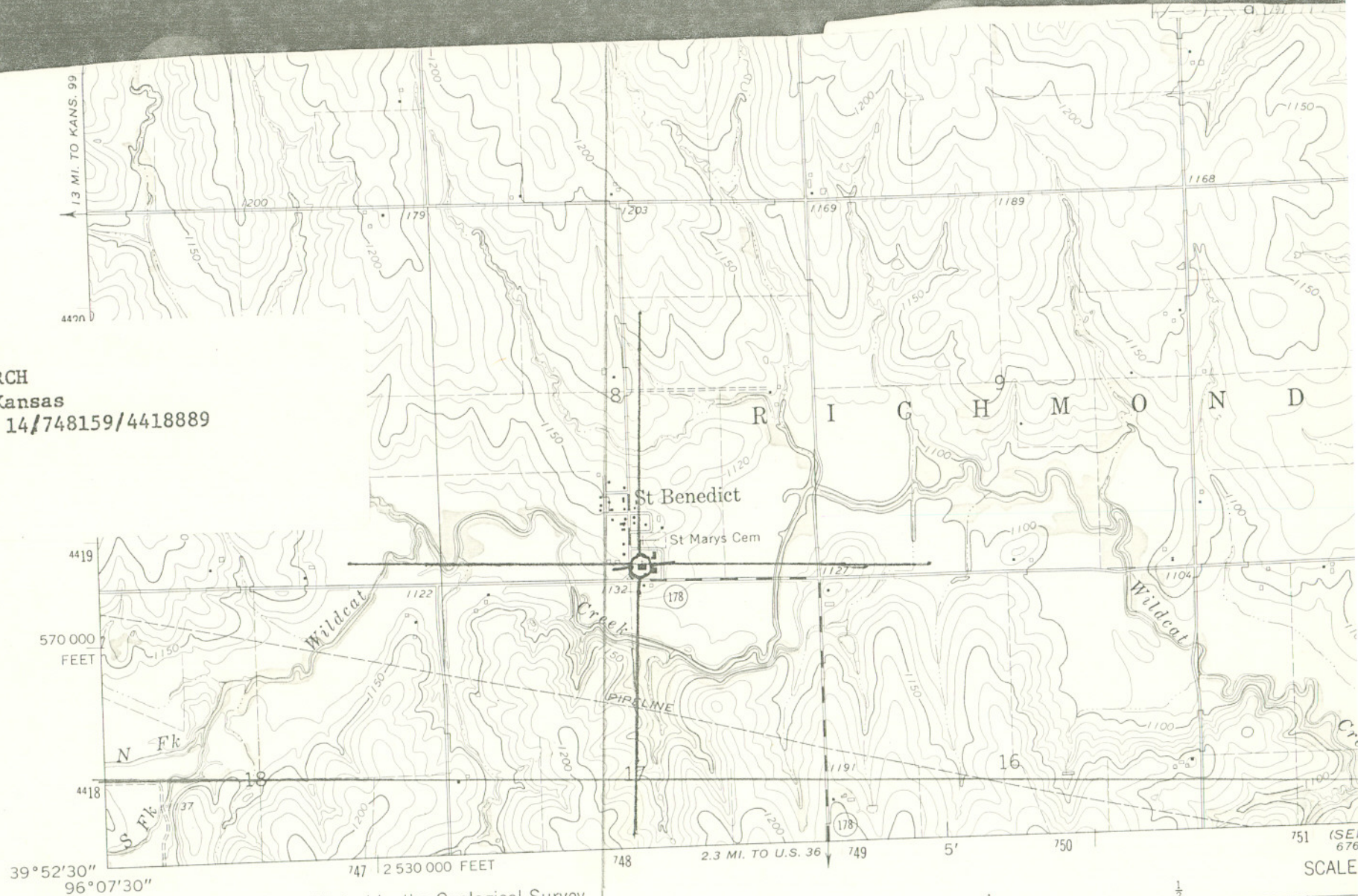
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

MARY'S CHURCH
 St. Benedict, Kansas
 UTM Reference: 14/748159/4418889

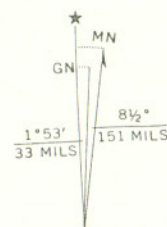


(BAILEYVILLE)
 67631 SW

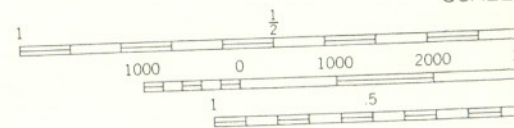
Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
 in cooperation with State of Kansas agencies
 Control by USGS and USC&GS

Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial
 photographs taken 1965. Field checked 1966

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
 10,000-foot grid based on Kansas coordinate system, north zone
 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
 zone 14, shown in blue



UTM GRID AND 1966 MAGNETIC NORTH



CONTOUR INT
 DATUM IS M

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NAT